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THE GREAT CHANCERY SUIT OF GOTOBED v. BLITHERS.

IN SIX CHAPTERS.—CHAPTER I.

FOR many years, the ancient and venerable hamlet of Rising-cum-Lark had passed an existence untroubled by strife from within or disturbance from without. For many years, the monotony of its life had only been relieved by such strictly domestic events as best parlour-cleaning, hay-making, pie-serving-time, or 'the wife of Mr J. Smith of a little girl.' Such tender reminiscences as the last rose of summer, or the first dish of new potatoes, alone enabled its inhabitants to moralise over the lapse of time. Nothing like a murder or twins, an elopement or an enormous gooseberry, a fire or a toad imbedded in rock, had occurred within the memory of the oldest villager. No fortunes had been made, and none had been lost. There was no poverty, for every one possessed what he called 'his little something.' There were no amusements, because Miss Anastasia Tomkins set her face against frivolity. There was no business, because there was nothing particular to do. Nothing saved Rising-cum-Lark from utter and complete stagnation except a singular delusion, deeply implanted in the breast of every inhabitant, that Rising-cum-Lark was a very remarkable place.

It was not perhaps easy for a stranger to discern, at first sight, the grounds of this conviction. It is true that Miss Anastasia Tomkins declared that the 'rapture of repose' was there; and those less poetically gifted admitted the 'repose,' though they did not think much of the 'rapture.' Indeed, the village seemed as though nature had laid it in a cradle and tucked it in; for great hills embraced it, and clustering woods sheltered it, so that the noisy world was quite shut out. And the villagers partook of the character of the place; for they lived and died as if life were an opium pill, and troubles and joys mere poppy-head fomentations. Everything spoke of peace and tranquillity. In the woods of Rising-cum-Lark, the fragrant weasel (*Mustela fragrans*) passed

a life free from care, save when caught in the steel trap of the gamekeeper; in its meadows, the agile frog (*Rana agilis*) knew no sorrow, save when cut in half by the mower's scythe; in its back kitchens, the matronly cat (*Felis cantatrix*) increased her family devoid of anxiety, save when they were all drowned in the stable bucket; and in its streets and by-ways, the belated cur (*Catulus ululans*) never felt Black Care behind him, save when some urchin had tied a tin kettle to his tail. The inhabitants of Rising-cum-Lark lived together like a happy family in a cage, without—as we once heard a gentleman say, alluding to the monkey—any 'elements of combustion in their midst.'

And if the above-mentioned stranger were further compelled to 'pause and reflect'—strangers being a race notoriously liable to such an accident—he would still have been at a loss to discover any peculiarity in Rising-cum-Lark beyond its peacefulness. Its architecture was old, but plain and unassuming; and though its church was profusely decorated with carvings, yet these possessed but a local interest, being chiefly executed with a pen-knife in the interior of the pews, and representing the initials of the congregation. Daisies and butter-cups grew wild in its fields, and spring onions in its gardens, but these plants are not unknown elsewhere. At the head of its national school was a sample boy; but so there is a sample boy at the head of every national school. There were, moreover, within its bounds the following characters: a sweetly pretty girl, a triumphantly aged female, a bad man in ordinary, a drunkard in ordinary, a leading good man, a deputy good man, a parochial ghost (for public use, and having no connection with family apparitions), a mad bull, and a dog under a cloud; but we only mention these characters to shew that Rising-cum-Lark was not strange in this respect, for they are to be found in every country village of pretension, and, to speak logically, are the 'inseparable accidents' of country villages.

No; the real thing on which Rising-cum-Lark prided itself was an implacable gentility—a gentility that was self-sufficient, and scorned the outer

world; a gentility that armed the place like a hedgehog, whom none would venture to worry; a gentility that stiffened the vulgar into absurdity, and relaxed the polite into conceit; a lace-mitten gentility suggestive of tea, muffins, music, and despair. The influence of this gentility was all-pervading. No one that lived in the village escaped from it. Something in the atmosphere of the place—whether it was the natural flavour of the air, or a subtle emanation from the dust of the great family of the Gotobeds which slumbered in its churchyard—made Rising-cum-Lark an enchanted ground irresistibly bringing on gentility. The very children were not as other children, but had the hooping-cough politely behind their gloves, and you half expected to see the dogs put their paws before their mouths when they gaped. The very rooks caught the infection, and assumed an air of respectful secrecy which gave them the appearance of family lawyers. The rector, in his undergraduate days at Oxford, had been rather noted for singing a good song about *Three Jolly Postboys*; but he was no sooner inducted into the living, than the exceeding stiffness of his neckcloth, and the bulginess of his cheeks above it, marked him as a churchman whose orthodoxy was beyond suspicion. The doctor, in his student days, was supposed to have smoked blacker clay pipes, to have known the Christian names of more barmaids, and to have been a greater critic of the taps of porter in the neighbourhood of Clare Market, than any of his contemporaries at King's. But he no sooner bought the practice, than he invented a respectable clearing of the throat, that put his safety as a practitioner beyond a doubt, and was of itself a specific in nervous disorders.

When all were so genteel, it seems invidious to particularise. But in truth the gentility of the place culminated in Miss Anastasia Tomkins, who kept the boarding-school for young ladies. She was a tall and stately woman; and it may help the reader to picture to himself her general appearance, if we say that a stranger, meeting her for the first time, would not be unlikely, through some remote association of thoughts, to whistle *The British Grenadiers*. Her nose was of the most advanced Duke-of-Wellington order; but from beneath it, the tones of her voice, like a strain of music issuing from under a frowning portcullis, came in gentle and refined accents. She was a passionate devotee of modern poetry, and talked much of her 'inner life.' Matters of heraldry and coat-armour were much considered in Rising-cum-Lark, and the crest of Miss Tomkins was thought to have a very beautiful significance—it represented a griffin smelling at a forget-me-not. This cognizance was abundantly displayed on all convenient parts of a large house near the church, the bricks of which were so red, and the lawn in front so green, that it looked like a first attempt with a sixpenny paint-box, and suggested the family of Noah and a miniature tea-service of tin. Here Miss Tomkins received a limited number of young ladies, all of whom were highly connected, and rejoiced in parentage untainted by trade. To these young ladies, Miss Tomkins, being of a poetic turn, was in the habit of alluding as her 'young gazelles.' When her 'young gazelles' came to know her too well, and gave a quarter's notice, their places were always supplied by an equal number of young gazelles from the Sahara of the

outer world. Thus Miss Tomkins flourished, and became genteeler every year. When she had numbered among her pupils the niece of a county member, she defied the scholastic world; and when she had sent away an otherwise unexceptional girl, whose first-cousin was discovered to be in the bone-boiling line, her triumph was complete.

The extraordinary thing about this gentility of Rising-cum-Lark was, that it could hardly have been expected from the character of the place. The village was in a northern county. On every side of it the country roared with the din and hurry of commerce. On every side lay prosperously ugly towns, where machinery whirled all day, and furnaces glared all night. All around might be seen the square-cut mansions of men who—to use their own expression—had 'riz from nowt,' and who looked at black chimneys with the affection inspired by early associations. Bordering the parish was a dark and muddy canal, on which fleets of barges passed, loaded with iron, cotton, or wool. No place boasting gentility ever had such a vulgar neighbourhood as Rising-cum-Lark.

But perhaps it was the very vulgarity of its surroundings that gave such a zest to the gentility of Rising-cum-Lark. The place seemed like an oasis of high breeding in a wilderness of snobbery. And Rising-cum-Lark steadily averted its eyes from commerce, and would none of the allurements of factories or forges. When a visitor was admitted into the stately courtesies of its society, if, haply, he felt an inward consciousness of interest in the 'liveliness of mule-twists,' or the 'deadness of pig-iron,' he blushed at his own base-born thoughts, and held his peace for very shame. Luckily, the sheltered situation of Rising-cum-Lark kept all traces of commerce from its aristocratic eyes; and the awful dignity of its inhabitants—to say nothing of Miss Anastasia Tomkins—entirely protected it from personal invasion.

Every place has its peculiar cultus or hero-worship. The towns which lay near Rising-cum-Lark adored, according to their respective lights, Jackson and coal-mines, Muggins and mule-spinning, or Higginbotham and dye-works. Rising-cum-Lark, for its part, worshipped the Gotobeds and high birth. Now, the Gotobeds were a great race. Their pedigree was one of the longest in England, and at an early period of their history, they had discovered that a steady persistence in one path was the surest road to success. Accordingly, for many generations, the Gotobeds had devoted themselves to the task of descending from their ancestors. Ever since the days of legend—some said earlier—each Gotobed had been the son of his father, and before he died had been blessed with a son who took the same view of the responsibilities of life. Absorbed in this duty, the Gotobeds had never distinguished themselves in any other way. And yet such oneness of character perhaps made them the more interesting. There was a singleness of aim in their lives which was almost touching. So it came to pass that antiquaries, compilers of county history, and the inhabitants of Rising-cum-Lark, bowed down before the Gotobeds as before superior beings.

At the time of our story, the inheritor of the family honours and traditions was a Gotobed worthy of his high birth. He was the son of his father; and for him the round world did not

contain such another fact. His only ambition was to preserve his estates and the village of Rising-cum-Lark exactly as they came to him. His political creed was simple, yet comprehensive. 'It was the duty of every right-minded person,' said Mr Gotobed, with some ambiguity of metaphor, 'to assist in stemming the tide of the thin end of the wedge.' In this idea, Rising-cum-Lark seconded him heart and soul, and so did Miss Anastasia Tomkins.

Setting aside the Gotobeds, who moved—or rather stood still—in their own sphere, the society of the place was but limited. It comprehended merely the rector, the doctor, Miss Anastasia Tomkins, and a little old gentleman, living in a gabled house near the park gates, who, on the strength of an iron-gray moustache and the loss of one arm in a turnip-chopping machine, was vaguely regarded as an authority on military matters. These confederate powers cultivated their alliance in cycles of tea-parties, and mourned in concert, with a haughty grief, over the age in which they lived, and Mr Darwin's theory about the descent of man. Like bees who would continue to gather honey though Dr Watts' songs had never been written, they pursued gentility without wishing for worldly fame.

There was yet another gentleman who was just outside the charmed pale of the society. This was Mr Barry O'Looney, the doctor's red-haired assistant. The reason of his exclusion was that he had fallen in love with the niece of the county member, Miss Anastasia Tomkins' most cherished flower. His passion was desperate; he gazed at her in church, and became an ambuscade for the young ladies in their walks abroad. He thought of her all day, and dreamed of her all night. Once, indeed—so the story goes—he had such a blissful dream of a happy marriage, that, with the characteristic enthusiasm of his nation, he supped for several nights in succession off cold plum-pudding, cold pork, and toasted cheese, in order to insure a disturbed night, and the return of so delightful a dream. But he dreamed, instead, of being kicked by the county member; and desisted from further experiments on his stomach. There never was a more hopeless case. He had no means of communicating his affection except by rolling his eyes in church when no one was looking. He turned over in his mind a wild project of sending her a sonnet, written on tissue-paper, and concealed in a blue pill; and he also debated with himself the desirability of serenading her with the tune of *St Patrick was a Gentleman*—the only one he knew—set to somewhat tenderer words than the original song. At last, grown reckless, he wrote a letter, wherein he said, with much pathos, that his heart was like the Irishman's waistcoat, whereof only the arm-holes remained. The letter also contained many other pretty nothings of the same sort, so dear to lovers. The letter was opened by Miss Anastasia Tomkins. From that time, it was understood by the society of Rising-cum-Lark that Mr Barry O'Looney was a young man who must be kept at a distance.

Such was the primitive state of Rising-cum-Lark and its society. How long this happy condition of things might have lasted it is impossible to conjecture. The village might have gone on worshipping the Gotobeds, and congratulating itself on its gentility till the end of time, but for

one dreadful event, which, so to speak, transformed the tranquil waters of Rising-cum-Lark into a cataclysm of rage and fury. That event was the arrival of Mr Nathaniel Blithers.

CHAPTER II.

Who was Mr Blithers? That was exactly the question to which not a soul in Rising-cum-Lark could return an answer. One thing was certain—the like of him had never been seen in the place before. He was a big, stout man, with a moist face; a nose of a dusky red, that seemed not unfamiliar with smuts; and a double chin, adorned at its extreme point with a fierce, obstinate tuft of black hair, that looked as though it had broken out by force, and intended to remain where it was, all razors to the contrary and notwithstanding. His usual attire, for both morning and evening, was a dress-coat, which contrasted ill with a pair of large-checked plaid trousers, and a yellow seal-skin waistcoat. He wore no gloves, and apparently never washed his hands. He was loud and violent in his ways: he smoked the biggest and oiliest of cigars; and when he took snuff, his most partial friends were reminded of a trombone. He was horribly vulgar; the deities he swore by were 'Gum' and 'Jingo.' He had not been in Rising-cum-Lark a week before he openly, and in the light of day, alluded to Mr Gotobed by the title of 'Ould Stick-i'-th'-mud.' He had not been there a fortnight before he had kissed his hand to Miss Tomkins' charge, walking in solemn procession, and sent that lady home in a state of trembling rigidity, like an automaton with a spring or two broken. He avowed an opinion to the landlord of the *Pig's Head* that the place wanted 'wakken-ing oop;' and that he, 'Nat Blithers,' intended to 'mak 'em all look aloive.'

The way in which Mr Blithers gained a footing in Rising-cum-Lark was as follows. Directly opposite Gotobed Hall—the shrine and sanctuary of all that Rising-cum-Lark held sacred—stood a quaint and picturesque farmhouse, surrounded by a few acres of meadow and pasture, which sloped down to the canal. This little farm was just outside the park-wall, and distant from the house about a quarter of a mile. The farm buildings, and the orchards that encircled them, formed a pleasant feature in the landscape, and hid from the eyes of Mr Gotobed the canal and its barges. The land, indeed, did not belong to the Gotobed family, as all the rest of the parish did; but they had never coveted its possession. The honest old yeoman race, who had tilled the farm for two or three centuries, had always been as much the vassals of the great family as their own tenants. At last, however, this old yeoman race died out. The land was to be sold. Mr Gotobed would gladly have bought it; but money was scarce, his sons expensive, and he never dreamed of danger. A sale by public auction was held; and Mr Blithers became the purchaser in fee-simple of the farmhouse and the land sloping down to the canal.

No sooner was the purchase completed, the money paid, and the title-deeds delivered, than Mr Blithers arrived at Rising-cum-Lark, and took up his quarters at the *Pig's Head*. No sooner had he arrived, than an ominous feeling began to creep about the village that something terrible was about to happen. A horrible mystery that enveloped the

man irritated Rising-cum-Lark beyond conception. Who was he? What was he? What did he want? What was his object in buying the land? To these questions, absolutely, no answer could be returned. Mr Blithers continued to occupy a bedroom and sitting-room at the *Pig's Head*. He made himself very agreeable to the company which assembled there in the evening. He visited his newly purchased farm every day; but beyond this nothing could be ascertained. Mr Blithers took no steps to find a tenant for the farm, and he evidently was no farmer himself. Many attempts were made in the smoke-room of the *Pig's Head* to pump Mr Blithers as to his intentions; but to all such attempts he merely replied with a wink, or with the reiterated assurance that he meant 'to mak 'em all look alive.' This dark saying nearly drove the place mad.

After a time, Mr Blithers began to entertain company at his hostelry. From neighbouring towns came friends of his, all, like himself, fat, vulgar, and addicted to big oily cigars. As soon as they came, Mr Blithers took them down to see his farm. They seemed intensely interested in some secret plan. All day long they were engaged in measuring and surveying, or stood consulting with their hats on one side, and their thumbs in their waistcoat pockets. On such occasions, it was noticed that Mr Blithers frequently pointed with a sinister meaning in the direction of Gotobed Hall, and that, whenever he did so, his friends were instantly doubled up with laughter. After that, they would return to the inn purple with inward amusement. Whatever did it all portend?

As we are told in natural-history books that wild horses, in the presence of danger, place themselves in a circle with their heads together and their heels outward, so did the society of Rising-cum-Lark take counsel, and prepare for defence. The mystery that hung about Mr Blithers so disturbed their minds, as to lead to the entire cessation of their usual business of doing nothing in particular. They held councils of war at each other's houses. Never had the village shop so many orders for muffins, crumpets, Sally Lunn's, and tea-cakes. The military gentleman with one arm wore his dress-clothes four times in a single week. The rector preached old sermons, because he could not give his mind to the composition of new ones. The doctor's head became so confused that he sent Miss Betty Parkins a bottle of water coloured green and flavoured with peppermint, instead of her usual dose of water coloured pink and flavoured with camphor. And when it came to the doctor's turn to entertain the company, Mr Barry O'Looney apologised so humbly for his indiscretion, and talked so bravely about his 'ancestors' in County Donegal, that Miss Tomkins (metaphorically) took him to her arms, and forgave him on the spot. At these tea-parties, the discussion as to Mr Blithers gave a piquancy to the tea, and added a zest to the muffin. But though they argued about Mr Blithers from the crown of his head to the sole of his foot, the united sagacity of the party failed to fathom his profundity; and no solution of their doubts could be found. The general feeling of Rising-cum-Lark was somewhat like that of the gentleman who saw the head of a boa-constrictor just inside his bedroom window—they thought that *there was more to follow*.

Suddenly Mr Blithers, when he had been staying

at the *Pig's Head* for about a month, manifested a desire to cultivate friendly relations with the society of the place, and thereby caused a greater flutter than ever in Rising-cum-Lark. He called on the rector, and in the most unabashed manner expressed his wish to be on good terms with that dignitary of the church. Views varied, urged Mr Blithers; and why? Because there was a many views. But what was views? Nowt. And if the rector wanted a fi-pun note for his ould church, or, happen, for hissell, when bills was 'eavy at Christmas toime, he (Mr Blithers) 'ud be most 'appy. The rector could scarce refrain from kicking Mr Blithers into the street. Undaunted by his cool reception at the rectory, Mr Blithers next betook himself to Miss Anastasia Tomkins' establishment, where he was shewn into the drawing-room, and became painfully aware, during a long interval of waiting, that a strong draught through the keyhole converted giggles into sneezes. When at length a stiff watered silk appeared, with Miss Tomkins suspended swimmingly inside it, he hastened to ingratiate himself with that lady. He had called, he explained, on behalf of a friend of his who had a daughter 'as was gettin' a big lass, an' terrible back'ard in her schoolin'.' Come now, what might Miss Tomkins' terms be for a 'big lass in her teens?' To which Miss Tomkins answered, that her establishment was not for people in his class of life. And, to enforce her words, she swam about the room at him in such an alarming way, that he beat a hasty retreat, harassed by eyes from all the bedrooms. Miss Tomkins herself instantly retired to her private apartment, and had a comfortable attack of palpitations and teaspoonfuls of brandy. Next, this bold man met Mr Gotobed, and, holding out a very perspiring hand, offered his acquaintance on the spot with the remark that 'neebours should be neebours.' But Mr Gotobed muttered something about insolence and the thin end of the wedge, and passed on. When Mr Blithers went to bed that night, the light of his eye was obscured with liquor, and the expressions of his tongue, the landlord said, 'were such as tom-cats would be ashamed on.'

The morning after these awkward attempts on the part of Mr Blithers, the astonishment of Rising-cum-Lark was changed into pure bewilderment. A large army of navigators, led by a gentleman in a brown greatcoat and brigand hat, came by an early train to a neighbouring station; and after refreshing themselves with a few quarts of ale apiece, they marched down to the farm. Under the guidance of the gentleman in the brigand hat, they commenced a work of destruction: they pulled down the farmhouse; they cut down the orchard, and grubbed up the hedgerows; they drove piles into the canal bank, and produced more mud than they knew what to do with, though they carried as much as they conveniently could about their own persons. And while their hands made the place a wilderness, their voices made it a howling wilderness. So long as they continued in Rising-cum-Lark, it was their custom, every evening after their work was done, to get exceedingly drunk, and then to serenade the village with songs, so rude and boisterous, that Miss Tomkins' young ladies were sent to bed an hour earlier than usual, with cotton-wool in their ears, and a stern injunction to keep their heads well under the bed-clothes.

Simultaneously with the navigators there arrived in Rising-cum-Lark another stranger, who gave himself the name of Samuel Bubb, and who announced himself to be Mr Blithers' foreman. He was a hard-featured man, with a taste for machine-oil as a perfume, a morbid preference for a lump of cotton-waste in the place of a pocket-handkerchief, and a tendency to draw ground-plans with the end of a very broad and dirty thumb illustrative of any remarks he might be offering.

As a slumbering invalid, on whom, unconscious of the outrage, a strong blister has been placed, awakes and demands an explanation, so did the inhabitants of Rising-cum-Lark, with Mr Gotobed at their head, and the military gentleman with one arm bringing up the rear, feel that the time had come for satisfying their doubts. It had come.

Early one morning, when the navigators had nearly finished their work, Mr Gotobed was seated in his morning room at Gotobed Hall. This was his favourite room. It was dark, sombre, and oak-panelled. The furniture was black with age. Over the chimney-piece, the family arms, paternal and hereditary, were painted—namely, Sable, on a fess argent a dormouse proper dormant between two night-caps gules. Above was the family crest, a mailed hand grasping a candlestick. Beneath was the family motto, *Sterto vigilantis naso*. On one side of the fire-place hung an iron mace plentifully studded with sharp points, and bearing on its handle in half-defaced characters the legend, '*j for hys nobbe*.' on the other side hung an antique petronel, which was supposed to be still loaded with a silver bullet once intended for Oliver Cromwell. On a side-table stood a posset-cup of the time of Queen Elizabeth; and, flanking it, a cauldle-cup of the time of Queen Anne. Round the walls were suspended portraits of the Gotobed ancestors, all clad in armour, and smiling feebly, as if their armour tickled them. In this room Mr Gotobed was studying the *Times* when Mr Samuel Bubb was announced. A powerful odour of anti-friction grease, that Mr Bubb brought with him, at the same time announced itself.

'My name, sir,' said the visitor in a thick voice, 'is Samuel Bubb. I'm Mr Blithers' foreman; an' I've called on business.' So saying, Mr Bubb, in a very methodical and determined way, took a chair, placed it close to the table near which Mr Gotobed was sitting, sat down, drew a large handful of cotton-waste from his pocket, wiped his mouth with it, and confidently waited encouragement to proceed.

'State it,' said Mr Gotobed shortly. He did not like the man's manner.

'You'll hexcuse my speaking through my nose,' said Mr Bubb.

Mr Gotobed intimated, by a stately motion of his hand, that he would waive any objection to that channel of eloquence.

'It's a bad could arisin' out o' th' mud an' slutch by th' canal banks,' explained Mr Bubb.

'Oh!' said Mr Gotobed in a majestic voice.

'Did you ever try a sup o' warm rum an' wayter w' a lump o' butther in't for a could?' inquired Mr Bubb with much friendliness.

'I thought,' exclaimed Mr Gotobed angrily, 'you'd come on business.'

'So I have,' said Mr Bubb.

'Then be so good as to mention it,' retorted Mr Gotobed.

But Mr Bubb seemed in no hurry to begin. He looked cunningly at Mr Gotobed out of the corners of his eyes, and said apologetically: 'It's short an' sweet, like a donkey's gallop.'

'Can't you say what you want?' demanded Mr Gotobed.

A malevolent grin flickered for a moment over Mr Bubb's features. He placed his hands on his knees, and bending forwards, said in a hoarse voice: 'On that piece o' ground as Mr Blithers has purchased, it is his intention to erect a works for the manufacture of his PATENT CACOSMIA.'

'His what?' gasped Mr Gotobed.

'It's good Latin,' answered the foreman with some pride. 'For the hinvention o' that there word, Mr Blithers he paid eighteenpence to a Hoxford scholar as was short of a job through drink. An' it means *Patent Chemical Liquid Manure*.'

Mr Gotobed started from his chair. The veins in his forehead swelled, his breath came short and fast. Had it been possible to annihilate Mr Bubb on the spot, he would have done so. In old times, the Gotobeds had possessed or taken baronial privileges. There is no doubt that Sir Richard de Gotobed (known to the chroniclers as Sir Dickon of the Bloody Toe), who was knighted on the field of Agincourt for killing a Frenchman with one kick of his mailed boot, would have instantly ordered Mr Bubb to the gallows, 'unhousel'd, disappointed, unanel'd.' The march of modern civilisation only rendered it possible for the descendant of this doughty warrior to blow his nose; and he did so. To a person of refined perceptions, this inarticulate remonstrance would have been sufficiently significant; but Mr Bubb, without seeming to notice it, refreshed himself with another wipe with his cotton-waste, and proceeded in a cheerful and unembarrassed fashion.

'Mr Blithers says,' continued he, 'as the place wants stirring up a bit; and he says, says he, what a nice amusin' hoccupation it'll be for Mr Gotobed to watch th' progress o' th' hoperations from his parlour window.'

'And is this what you've come to say, man?' ejaculated Mr Gotobed, who was trembling from head to foot.

'No, mister, it is na,' returned Mr Bubb. 'Hobserve my thumb-nail.'

'Confound your thumb-nail! Ahem; go on,' said Mr Gotobed.

'Your eye, sir,' proceeded Mr Bubb, taking a sheet of paper which lay near, 'being on my thumb-nail, you'll follow easy. There's a leetle tiny corner o' your land as it'd be convenient to cart th' building materials across'—here Mr Bubb made a ground-plan of the corner on the sheet of paper with his thumb, which marked quite as well as a broad black-lead pencil—'an' Mr Blithers 'ud be proud to pay 'andsome for any damage done, as betwix gentlemen. Come, governor!'

In that room in which Mr Bubb was seated had Guy de Gotobed discreetly slumbered when questioned as to his theological tenets by Father Dominic in the reign of Queen Mary: in that room had Blazius de Gotobed slept the sleep of liquor and loyalty after drinking the health of the Blessed Martyr: in that room had Wynkyn de Gotobed gracefully dozed while His Sacred Majesty Charles II. kissed Marian Hackett, the tire-woman, behind the screen: in that room had Wakefield de

Gotobed prudently snored while the Pretender was disguised in one of the housekeeper's gowns: could it be borne that the latest inheritor of these glorious memories should in that room be told to 'Come, governor,' by a man who used cotton-waste instead of a pocket-handkerchief! It could not.

'You may not be aware, my man,' said Mr Gotobed in the measured tones of extreme anger, 'that this estate is celebrated for a peculiarly large and ferocious breed of wolf-hounds!'

'I were not,' replied Mr Bubb, abstractedly attempting a ground-plan of the wolf-hounds on a fresh sheet of paper, and making them very black about the muzzle with a dexterous turn of his thumb.

'Then,' shouted Mr Gotobed, springing up and striking the table violently with his clenched fist, 'if Mr Blithers, or any of his dirty radical crew, or any horse, dog, or cat belonging to him, dare to draw a single cart-load of building materials across my land—here Mr Gotobed relapsed into impressive slowness, and continued with awful vagueness—'in such a case my keepers will have their orders, and the wolf-hounds will have theirs.'

'Mr Blithers *did* say,' retorted Mr Bubb, fumbling with his cotton-waste, 'as he 'oped there'd be no bones about it.'

'No what?' almost screamed Mr Gotobed.

Mr Bubb's temper was roused, and he replied unflinchingly: 'No bones.'

'Leave the room, and'—Mr Gotobed had recently been reading the tale of *The Raven*; he was about to add: 'Take thy beak from out my heart;' but he looked at Mr Bubb, and substituted—'never let me see you here again.'

By the evening of that black day all Rising-cum-Lark had become aware that Mr Blithers was about to erect in their midst a manufactory of Patent Cacosmia; and Miss Anastasia Tomkins, with three smelling-bottles held at her nose, and one by mistake at her ear, had fainted away on the school-room hearthrug.

THE MONT CENIS TUNNEL.

It has been our lot to witness, during the last few years, the successful completion of some of the greatest triumphs of engineering skill the world has ever seen. In 1866, the Atlantic Submarine Telegraph was laid, and the 1865 cable raised from the ocean-bed. The railway from New York to San Francisco, over the Rocky Mountains, three thousand three hundred miles in length, across North America, was finished about two years ago. This great distance is accomplished in about eight days, with considerable comfort, thanks to the sleeping and dining cars. One portion of this line it was necessary to roof in for forty miles, in order to protect it from avalanches and snow-drifts. In one part it is 8262 feet above the level of the sea. The Mont Cenis Summit or Fell Railway over the Alps was opened for public traffic in June 1868. The train climbs up to a height of 6870 feet by gradients, in some parts as steep as one in twelve, or steeper than the worst part of old Holborn Hill. The Suez Canal, opened in November 1869, one hundred miles in length, formed at an expenditure of millions, cut through the narrow neck of land which divided half the habitable world into two parts. And last, not least, the Mont Cenis Tunnel—the subject of the present paper.

The Mont Cenis Tunnel was projected in 1849 by Chevalier Mauns, a Belgian engineer of eminence. He had invented a powerful machine for long tunnel excavation, and wished to bring it into use. We mean by this that he was the first man who could obtain a hearing on the subject: an Italian, Giuseppe Médail, of Bardonnechia, was the first to conceive the idea; but he was treated as a theoretical enthusiast when he laid his plans before the Chamber of Agriculture and Commerce at Chambéry in 1842, and died soon afterward. M. Mauns, with the sanction of the Piedmontese government, made a careful survey of the spot recommended by Médail. In this he was assisted by Commendatore Sismonda, and their Report was published in 1849. The War of Independence of 1848-9 put a stop to the undertaking; but M. Mauns was turning his attention to a method of boring suitable to such a work. A few years after, Mr Thomas Bartlett and Signor Colladon brought forward boring schemes; but these were all eclipsed by the inventions of MM. Grandis, Grattoni, and Sommeiller, laid before the sub-alpine parliament in June 1856. These gentlemen solved the problem of the ventilation of the tunnel, perhaps the most difficult part of the undertaking. The whole scheme was shewn to be so feasible, that Victor Emmanuel inaugurated the work in 1857, and the survey commenced. This trigonometrical survey was no easy affair. The atmospheric fluctuations, at a height of from three thousand to ten thousand feet above the level of the sea, were considerable. An observatory was erected on the highest spot, Le Grand Vallon Peak, and, in spite of many obstacles, the observations were successfully taken. We are not surprised to learn that there were not wanting those who scoffed at the whole affair, and ridiculed the idea of piercing the Alps from opposite sides and meeting in the middle. Not only has the great feat been accomplished, however, but it has been done in a shorter time than competent engineers thought possible, and the chief credit is due to the energy of the Italians, and the determination of Count Cavour. It is an interesting fact that Sommeiller, a native of Savoy, and Grandis and Grattoni, Piedmontese, were sent by the Sardinian government to learn railway engineering in Great Britain.

From an official Report by Mr Francis Kossuth, we take the following respecting the method in which the true line was determined. 'The observatories placed at the two entrances to the tunnel were used for the necessary observations, and each observatory contained an instrument constructed for the purpose. This instrument was placed on a pedestal of masonry, the top of which was covered with a horizontal slab of marble, having engraved upon its surface two intersecting lines marking a point, which was exactly in the vertical plane containing the axis of the tunnel. The instrument was formed of two supports fixed on a tripod, having a delicate screw adjustment. The telescope was similar to that of a theodolite provided with cross webs, and strongly illuminated by the light from a lantern, concentrated by a lens, and projected upon the cross webs. In using this instrument in checking the axis of the gallery at the northern gallery, for example, after having proved precisely that the vertical plane corresponding with the point of intersection of the lines upon the slab also passed through the centre of the instrument,

a visual line was then conveyed to the station at Lachalle (on the mountain), and on the instrument being lowered, the required number of points could be fixed in the axis of the tunnel. In executing such an operation, it was necessary that the tunnel should be free from smoke or vapour. The point of collimation was a plummet suspended from the roof of the tunnel by means of an iron rectangular frame, in one side of which a number of notches were cut, and the plummet was shifted from notch to notch in accordance with the signals of the operator at the observatory. These signals were given to the man whose business it was to adjust the plummet by means of a telegraph or a horn. The former was found invaluable throughout all these operations.*

It may be as well to state that, though called after Mont Cenis, the Tunnel really pierces the Col de Fréjus, and is situated at least fifteen miles to the south-west of Mont Cenis. It is 3709 feet above the level of the sea, and 150 feet above the Mont Cenis Road at Modane. The average incline is one in forty-five to a point midway between the two entrances. The exact length, according to a very interesting account in the *Journal des Débats*, is 12,233 metres.* It was calculated that the distance would be 12,220 metres, so that the difference in the actual length is very little. This wonderful tunnel of seven and three-fifths miles is said to be four and a half miles longer than any railway tunnel ever made.

We now pass on to consider the machines by which this work has been accomplished. The same power—water—tunnelled the rock, and supplied the air to the workmen. Capital illustrations of the machinery will be found in the *Illustrated London News* (January 23 to February 13, 1869). The mountain streams of the neighbourhood, by hydraulic pressure, compressed the air to six atmospheres, and so worked the perforating machine. The water was collected in a large reservoir higher than the mouth of the tunnel, and a pressure obtained equal to twenty-six feet perpendicular. Ten air-compressing machines and two aerometers were placed near the mouth of the tunnel. The compressors were worked by the aerometers, which in their turn had yielded to the water-pressure. The air having been condensed in the compressors, was forced into the receivers to work the excavating machine. The latter consisted of ten perforators and seven jumpers, which latter bore into the rock, being worked by the compressed air instead of steam. These made a series of holes about a yard deep, which, when the jumpers had penetrated as far as they would go, were filled with gunpowder, and exploded. Before this was done, however, the whole machine and attendants retired to a safe distance behind stout wooden doors. The débris had then to be carried away. According to the nature of the rock, about two to three yards could be accomplished in twenty-four hours. The machine excavated an area of twelve feet by eight; the rest had to be done by hand; and we have seen it stated that operations would have been conducted quicker if gun-cotton had been used instead of gunpowder, owing to the smoke made by the explosion of the latter. The following official figures shew the progress made each year: 1857, 38·08 metres;

1858, 459·52; 1859, 369·10; 1860, 343·30; 1861, 193·00; 1862, 243·00; 1863, 802·00; 1864, 1087·85; 1865, 1223·70; 1866, 1024·99; 1867, 1512·11; 1868, 1320·15; 1869, 1431·45; 1870, 1635·30 metres.

Light was wanted, of course; so the Italian engineers manufactured their gas. Throughout the work, these engineers have shewn themselves indefatigable; and under their superintendence the whole was carried out—France, on the annexation of Savoy, agreeing to pay half the cost.* The whole amount has been stated at sixty-five million francs, or L.2,600,000; but from other statements, we should think three million pounds nearer the mark. In consequence of the rapidity with which the work was executed, France has to pay 6,500,000 francs of the Italians' share; for at first it was thought it would take twenty-five years, and France had to pay five hundred thousand francs for every year less than the twenty-five, and six hundred thousand francs for every year less than fifteen. Imitators are springing up. Already the St Gothard is to be pierced; and enterprising English engineers even suggest a tunnel from England to France.

The old diligences took about nine hours to cross the Alps by the Mont Cenis route; the Fell Railway did the same in four and a half hours; and now the 'official' train went through the tunnel in thirty-eight minutes; and it is believed that, when the line is in full operation, only twenty minutes will be occupied.

The vertical distance of perforated stratum is about 7000 metres. To shew the absolute precision with which geologists can determine the structure of a mountain: In 1866, M. Sismonda read a paper before the Royal Academy of Sciences at Turin—a paper on the Geology of the Alps. He shewed a map made by him twenty-five years ago, exhibiting the theoretical succession of strata; and the Mont Cenis Tunnel has shewn that he was right in every particular. M. Elie de Beaumont read a paper before the French Academy of Sciences, September 18, to elicit the scientific teachings to be drawn from an examination of the specimens of minerals, &c., to illustrate the geology of the tunnel. He classifies 196 specimens under six different headings. 'Very few fossils were met with, such having been destroyed by a subsequent crystallisation. No artesian well has ever given an opportunity to be compared with the perforation of Mont Cenis, as the deepest bored by European engineers is only 1000 metres, and by the Chinese with their rope, only 3000 metres.† Mont Blanc is only 3500 metres above its own basis: this shews the great distance of the perforated stratum in the Mont Cenis Tunnel.

The works of the Alpine tunnel comprised, besides the tunnel itself, thirty miles of railway between Bussolino, on the Turin and Susa line, and Bardonnèche to the Italian opening of the tunnel; and the ten or eleven miles of railway on the French or Savoy side from St Michel to Modane. The last ten was the only portion of the whole that fell to the French companies, and it is the only part uncompleted. The *Times* correspondent

* One regrets deeply that Signor Grandis and M. Sommeiller did not live to see their grand scheme completed: the latter died only in July.

† *Times*, September 26, 1871.

* In bringing metres into feet, it is only necessary to add a tenth of the computation, and multiply by three.

says he was nine and a half hours travelling from Macon to Modane, a distance which could with the greatest ease be got over in five or six hours. It is difficult to conceive how France can find it justifiable to run no other than an 'omnibus' train on one of the greatest highways of Europe. It is much to be regretted that there should be a dark side to the picture, and that is the obstacles thrown in the way of the quick working of their part of the line. The French wished to discourage the route to the East by Susa and Brindisi, and in order to save Marseilles, have thrown every impediment in the path of the successful management of the line. An intelligent correspondent of the *Standard* newspaper points out that the ten uncompleted miles of railway before mentioned are being constructed with the evident intention of bringing discredit on the works by laying the line at too low an elevation above the Arc mountain torrent. He says, if these ten miles are finished before the winter sets in, we shall hear of frequent interruptions in the traffic, owing to the swollen waters of the Arc flooding the line.

CECIL'S TRYST.

CHAPTER XXVIII.—'I WILL GO WITH THE REST TO-MORROW.'

FOR some days after the occurrence I have narrated, Cecil kept to his own apartments at the hotel, where I took an occasional meal with him alone; and before he felt sufficiently himself to revisit our house, an event took place which, for the present, removed from it the chief cause of his disinclination to do so. A telegram arrived for Nelly from the Gatcombe doctor, desiring her immediate presence at her grandfather's bed-side: the old man was dying, and had expressed an earnest wish to see her. Of course, she did not hesitate for a moment to obey such a summons; and as it was obvious she could not go alone, for many reasons—Sir Richard Harewood was still at the Manor-house, for one—Aunt Ben volunteered to accompany her, and what was a feat very creditable to the sex, which, with all its virtues, is apt to be a little slow in movements of departure, the two started off together within three-quarters of an hour of the receipt of the news. Thus it happened that Cecil and I were thrown more together alone than we had been even in the old Gatcombe days. Of course, after what had happened, I could not leave him to himself, even if I had wished to do so; and I did not wish it, partly on his own account, and partly because the only business of importance that called me from him gave me great embarrassment to pursue it; for the business was no other than the preparation of my play of the *Foot-page*, under the superintendence of Miss Brabant of the *Corintheum*, and the embarrassment arose from the fact, that Ruth was evincing a great desire to see Cecil—who was still unaware of my having discovered in the successful actress his old flame—and I had not the courage to tell her that his heart (though it might love her still, as of yore) was more steeled against her love than ever.

This change in her feelings towards him was caused, curiously enough, by the same event which had made him more obstinate not to press his suit; namely, the death of Jane. Even if the mystery

of Richard Waller's fate should be cleared up, there would still now remain, as my cousin had himself told me, a positive disinclination to meet Ruth, upon the ground of his dead sister's strong dislike to her; and this was not so pleasant a piece of news to communicate that I should willingly put myself in the way of having it extracted by cross-examination. That Ruth would cross-examine me, I was convinced, for she had already put some leading questions, which I had had some difficulty to answer, in the single interview I had had with her since Cecil's return. It was clear to me she wished to see him, and, as I thought, counted upon her novel charms—for her beauty was greatly heightened by tasteful attire and ornament, and her conversation had acquired, in the forcing-house of theatrical life, a piquancy quite incredible, considering the short space of time that had elapsed since she was a mere village girl—to quench the faint embers of morbid feeling that might still remain to him, now that Jane was no longer at his side to fan them and keep them aglow. What added to my perplexity still more, was, that Cecil on his part was somewhat desirous to see Miss Brabant, albeit he would on no account have been present (though, goodness knows, rehearsals are not gaieties) even at the rehearsal of my play. It was astounding, now that we were left alone together, how his old interest in my affairs began to shew itself. He made me tell him the whole lamentable story of the enactment of the *Pedlar's Pack* at the Hole-in-the-Wall, and was even won to smiles by its recital. Fortunately, the delays and mismanagement incidental to all theatrical proceedings postponed from week to week the bringing out of the *Foot-page*, and afforded an excuse for keeping Cecil and Miss Brabant apart; and in the meantime, circumstances were occurring at Gatcombe that might well demand my undivided attention.

When Nelly arrived at the Rectory, she found the old man speechless, and apparently dying, in consequence of a paralytic seizure. He knew her, it was plain, and seemed, by the expression of his distorted face, to welcome her; the designed mention of her name by the good doctor in his presence had indeed been the first thing to recall him to consciousness, and our old friend had thereupon taken the responsibility of telegraphing to us at once; but he was quite incapable of communicating his wishes more particularly. He could not stir a finger-joint, nor voluntarily wink an eyelid. The frame of iron had given way in all its parts with simultaneous completeness; the will alone was left as strong as ever, but powerless. Others could read its existence in the anxious fire of his sleepless eyes, but they could not, or would not, translate it. His punishment had indeed begun; for what must such as he have suffered, to know himself about to perish without sign, his last consuming desire unsatisfied, his last command unobeyed, because not understood! That he was reconciled with his grand-daughter was evident from the yearning glances that he threw towards her while she sat beside him, and the despairing look he wore whenever she left the room, even for a moment; and at last it struck the doctor that what lay so heavy on the sick man's mind must needs be in connection with her. Having come to this sagacious conclusion, he communicated it privately to Aunt Ben, with the following result (as I afterwards learned from her own lips).

'Man alive!' answered she impatiently, 'do you suppose I do not know it, or that poor Nelly yonder does not know it? I can tell you much more than that. Do you not see how, when his eyes are not upon her, they rove to the big escritoire, in which he keeps his papers, and from it to the fire-place, and back, and back again. He wants to burn his will!'

At this, the doctor slapped his knee so vigorously that it made Nelly start in her chair by the sick man's pillow.

'Miss Wray,' said he, 'Master Fred. may be the genius of the family, but you've got all the common sense. You're right, no doubt. What a shame, and what a pity it seems! I suppose it would not be permissible to—eh? But, of course, it wouldn't.'

'If one could give him speech but for one minute!' mused my aunt; 'or, still better, strength to enable him to make half-a-dozen strokes with his pen, they would be worth ten thousand pounds apiece to Nelly yonder.'

'If you promised me the money for myself, Miss Wray,' returned the doctor gravely, 'I could not do it.'

'I know it,' sighed she. 'Then don't let us speak about it any more.' And they did not; nor was it till years afterwards that Aunt Ben confided to me the bitter disappointment she had experienced on my account, and how very narrowly my Nelly had missed being a great heiress.

At last, the old man died; and his heaped-up wealth was found to be bequeathed to strangers. Most of it—curiously enough in one who had never cared in life for the respect of his fellow-men—was devoted to the preservation of his name as a Public Benefactor. Five thousand pounds went to the erection of the Bourne Fountain in the market-place of Monkton—a bronze erection of great pretensions, but which, in consequence of some complication in the machinery, is generally dry; a like sum was left to found a Bourne Chair of Political Economy in the Antipodes; and the rest fell to existing public charities, always with the proviso that, year by year, remembrance should be made of him who gave it.

'To my grand-daughter, Eleanor Bourne, who has displeased me,' was left the sum of one hundred pounds sterling, which subsequently purchased her *trousseau*.

All this was no worse than what I had expected for Nelly; and, as I told Cecil, I only blamed myself for having so long put off our marriage, in hopes of conciliating the old man.

'You are still but boy and girl, dear Fred,' observed he quietly.

'While you will be of age in a few weeks,' answered I, smiling, for I was fully resolved for the future to take all that he might say upon this matter in good part, if it should be possible to do so. 'I can remember the time, Cecil, when you yourself thought of marriage, though younger than I am now. You had always money, to be sure; but there were as great obstacles in your case as the want of it: whereas, in ours, there is nothing else to hinder us; and even as regards means, we have enough to live upon in a simple way. Besides, who knows but that the *Foot-page* may not turn out a gold mine!'

'That is true,' said he thoughtfully; 'who knows!'

It was a great comfort to me, upon Nelly's account, to feel that, though the idea of our marriage might be still distasteful to him, he had at least given up all thoughts of opposition to it. Notwithstanding this, however, I could see that the return of Eleanor from Gatcombe began at once to affect his spirits unfavourably, and that he soon shrank again, as before, within his shell of reticence and reserve.

But for this conduct upon Cecil's part, which gave me great pain, no matter how I strove to account for it, my life would now have been one of almost unmixed happiness. My marriage with Nelly was fixed for the ensuing spring; and, in the meantime, the darling object of my labours for the last two years was about to be realised in the appearance of the *Foot-page* at the *Corinthium*. Old Magnus, who had proved so deaf and inexorable when he had had to deal with an unknown author, was like clay to the potter in the hands of 'the Brabant,' and was all civility to her protégé—myself. I could not help alluding to the little misadventure of the *Peddler's Pack*; but he escaped from the subject in a glowing eulogium upon Lady Repton, through whose kind offices, it will be remembered, I had at last obtained from him the return of that pearl of plays, since cast upon the dunghill at the Hole-in-the-Wall. I had written to her Ladyship to inform her of the acceptance of my present play, and reminded her of her promise to come up to town to see it brought out; and, much to my satisfaction, she had announced her intention of doing so. His Lordship was laid up with a fit of the gout, but had given her leave of absence for a few days, which she was to spend under our own roof—a visit to which I looked forward with much greater pleasure than did her would-not-have-been hostess.

Dear Aunt Ben would as soon have parted with an article of her faith as with a prejudice; each one was vital with her, and she clung to it like a shipwrecked man to a buoy at sea. She was sometimes apparently convinced by argument, and the buoy went under—for a moment—but up it bobbed again the next, and there she was holding on by its rusty iron ring as fast as ever. Lady Repton was one of her 'horrors.' The rehearsals, to which an author was invited without his wife, was another. These performances, in sober truth, are, for the most part, neither meretricious nor attractive. To behold a young lady in fashionable morning attire playing a foot-page of the epoch of the Restoration, is not a captivating spectacle; to find one's principal actor entirely mistaking the character he is called upon to play, and yet so vain and obstinate that it is impossible to correct him, and dangerous to call him a fool, is not to plunge into a vortex of pleasure; nor to any one short of a cynic is it agreeable to find one's self the modest pivot around which a system of naked jealousies and very thinly clad downright hates revolve. The old man and his Ass is a faint figure to image the position of a dramatic author at a rehearsal; for while it is not less difficult to please everybody than it was for the sage in the fable, it is absolutely impossible for him to please the Ass.

However, this by the way, for our story concerns itself, not with my affairs, but with those of Cousin Cecil. He visited us now more seldom than ever, and resolutely refused all invitations to partake of our little gaieties. Mr Burder, for

example, though he had not dared to shew himself since that Southwark fiasco, would still send us occasional orders for the theatre; and although they were not good ones—being for the upper boxes and such-like second-floor situations—we took advantage of them, and by paying the difference of price, obtained good places cheaply; an object which, with matrimony drawing near, it was become desirable to effect. Cecil would never accompany us on these occasions, and rarely even dined with us, unless we were quite alone. However, on the day of Lady Repton's arrival, which was that preceding the production of my play, I insisted upon his meeting so old a friend, and after some demur, he consented to do so.

Lady Repton looked not a day older than when I had last seen her, and was as sprightly as ever. She gave some imitations of her husband during an attack of gout, which recur to my memory to this day, and never without filling my eyes with tears; they were not pathetic, however, in their character, especially when he was made to say to the footman: 'I flatter myself I have some little reputation as a philosopher, and—damme, sir, take that'—which was the footstool which the valet had omitted to place at the proper angle. She was laboriously civil to Aunt Ben, patronised Eleanor, and flirted with myself in the most unblushing manner. The gloom and silence of Cecil seemed to act upon her like the presence of the skeleton at the Egyptian feast, or, perhaps, it was that they heightened her merriment by contrast. She rallied him upon his performance of Ivanhoe in the old days at Gatcombe, and demanded of him the loving allegiance that he owed to her as Rowena; but the allusion seemed only to awaken unpleasant memories, and was received with marked disfavour. Not a whit discouraged, however, her Ladyship rattled on, chiefly upon that congenial theme, the stage. She had already overwhelmed me with questions about 'this Brabant,' as she called her, some of which had rather embarrassed me: 'Was she really pretty, or only young, which seems to do as well in these days? Had she any idea of acting, or was she a mere walking doll?' &c. I answered all these questions as truthfully as I could, consistent with the desire to please her Ladyship, who had evidently formed no very high opinion of her present successor to the throne of public favour. But when she put the question: 'How does she dress?' I trembled because of Aunt Ben.

'Oh, Miss Brabant dresses with great taste,' said I; 'and, I am bound to say, always looks like a lady.'

'Tut! I mean, how does she look as a *gentleman*?' inquired her Ladyship. 'Your pet page is not in petticoats, I suppose; you must have had a dress rehearsal.'

Now the fact was, that there *had* been a dress rehearsal that very afternoon, only I had not thought it worth while to mention it. Aunt Ben had been so foolishly particular, that I was quite glad to have been able hitherto to describe everybody behind the scenes as dowdy, commonplace, and unattractive; and besides, would not everybody have an opportunity of judging for themselves the very next night upon the question of attire. But Lady Repton was merciless, and I had to describe Miss Brabant's little costume down to the chocolate tights, while my aunt pursed her

lips, and even Eleanor wore two little blush-roses, which deepened into peonies when her Ladyship told her 'not to mind,' since she (Lady Repton) had had personal experience that her Fred. was faithful. 'I fished for him myself, my dear, down at Gatcombe, and he never rose to the fly, nor even so much as nibbled.' This was terrible enough, but there was worse coming, for the sprightly creature suddenly turned round to Cecil, with: 'You're going, of course, to-morrow night, sir, with the rest of us *claqueurs*?'

'No,' stammered Cecil, turning quite pale beneath her flashing eyes. 'I have no spirits for it. I think I shall be better at home.'

'What!—not going to see your best friend's first piece brought out?' cried she impetuously. 'Are you afraid of its being a failure, then? Why, that is only another reason why you should go, to give him the help of your hands.'

'Indeed,' said Cecil hastily, 'I am not afraid of that. Fred. has said himself, that if the play breaks down it will be his own fault, so that I feel quite certain of its success.'

'Then why not go?' insisted her Ladyship, who, to my great distress, was evidently getting angry upon my account. 'If you are in bad spirits, that is no reason why you should neglect your duties—for it is a duty to see your friend through his first piece.'

'Cecil has had a great trouble, you know, Lady Repton,' whispered my aunt; 'and it weighs upon him still.'

'I know that well, my dear madam,' replied her Ladyship softly. 'But, in my humble judgment, you are all going the wrong way to work with him.' Then she whispered something into Cecil's ear which made him crimson. I guessed what it was, though I trust no one else did. She told him that if his sister Jane had been alive, the very woman for whose sake he was debarring himself from this pleasure, she would have been the first to have gone to see my play, and done her very best for it. 'Come,' continued she aloud; 'you will not refuse me now, Mr Cecil; I charge you, upon your allegiance.'

And, to the surprise and horror of us all, Cecil answered humbly: 'Very well, Lady Repton. If you think it right, I will go with the rest to-morrow to see Fred.'s play.'

She as little thought, of course (since we had not told her about Ruth), what she was asking him, as did he what he had consented to do.

CHAPTER XXIX.—THE FIRST NIGHT OF THE FOOT-PAGE.

It may be, and doubtless is, a vain and pitiful confession to make, but I honestly believe there are few things so personally interesting in human affairs as is the first production of a play to its author. It has all the flutter and excitement of a first book, with that supplement of chance, which gives whist its pre-eminence in interest over chess; for its first success or failure (if not its final fate) depends on many things quite independent of its merits—ability of the actors, the manner in which it is placed upon the stage, and the temper of the audience. Moreover, the mere novelist is unable to judge, except by the gradual evidence of circulation, whether his work has been acceptable or not, whereas the dramatic writer is crowned or

sentenced off hand; every character he has drawn appears in flesh and blood before his judges, and is pronounced upon at once by sibilation or applause. The anticipation of all this is a very sufficient excitement for any young gentleman, especially if his future—so far as material prosperity is concerned—is to be affected, as mine was, by the result; and yet, I protest, that from the moment Cecil announced his intention of accompanying us to the theatre, my hopes and fears upon my own account were wholly swallowed up in my apprehensions upon his; for what might not be the effect upon one so sensitively organised, and in a state of mind so morbid and abnormal, in suddenly being confronted with the woman I felt sure he still adored, though he might not own it even to himself, under circumstances so strange and unexpected! Would he shrink into the corner of the box, with a cry of wonder or horror? Or would he leap from it on to the stage, and embrace his beloved object, regardless of her ruffles and tights? In either case, the incident would be too sensational not to divide the interest of the audience, to the detriment of the piece, and especially of its heroine. I could not, of course, but regard the matter as it affected Ruth as well as Cecil. With what startling suddenness would the apparition of her old lover strike her also (since I had told her positively that he would not be present), and perhaps at the very moment when she most required all her professional wits; and yet, to send her word that he was coming was likely to unhinge her altogether, and not only produce the failure of the play, but damage, perhaps irretrievably, her favour with the public for the future! If this last consideration did not occur to Aunt Ben and Eleanor, they were excessively nervous, both upon my account and Cecil's; and if we had suddenly received news that the Corinthum was in flames, and insured (for, curiously enough, no one feels for the shareholders of an insurance office), I do believe it would have been welcomed by all three of us. Lady Repton, to whom 'first nights' were familiar, and who had a friendly confidence in the merits of my play, which she had perused, was, on the other hand, in the highest spirits, and rallied us all on our pale faces.

'It'll go, Fred., it'll go,' said she—meaning that the piece would take—if only Miss Brabant understands her business. Dear me! if I was but a few years younger, how I should like to be in her place, and hear you thank me when all was over.—Eleanor, my dear, have you got a wreath for him? He will be led upon the stage by the manager, like a house lamb, you know, and have to bow with his hand, so. Then aim your wreath at him like a hoop at a *la grasse* stick.—Your heart is on the left side, remember, my dear Fred., and don't put your hand too low: but there, I daresay you have been practising it all the morning.'

Her Ladyship was quite in her element, for the stage was more than second nature with her, it was nature itself, and even this indirect connection with it had all the effect upon her of a cordial.

We had an excellent box, in which the three ladies occupied the front seats, while Cecil and I sat as far back as I could put the chairs—a disposition such as I knew would please him, and which, little guessing the real cause, he set down to my modesty. The first piece was a farce, upon which Lady Repton passed sharp judgment, the severity

of which I am inclined to think was partly owing to the fact that nobody recognised her. She had often bewailed to me how fleeting were dramatic reputations, however great; but perhaps she had not been without a hope that some old playgoers would have levelled their glasses in her direction, and joggling one another's elbows, whispered together that it was *She*. Those who looked towards our box, alas, were not old playgoers, but young ones, and the object of their attraction was Nelly.

At last the farce was over, and the curtain rose on the first scene of the *Foot-page*. I endeavoured to fix my eyes upon the stage, but as the moment drew near for the heroine to appear, I found them involuntarily wandering towards Cecil. A burst of applause informed me that she had come forward, but I could not turn them from him; the expected scene from real life had more interest for me than the mimicry of the drama, although it was the child of my own pen. To my intense relief, though likewise to my great surprise, it was evident that Cecil did not recognise Ruth. He was staring at her with interest indeed, but without a spark of excitement, and presently he whispered smilingly: 'She acts well, Fred., and does you justice.'

The audience seemed to think so too, for the applause was loud and frequent. Even Lady Repton condescended to remark that the young woman had something beside good legs to recommend her. 'She paints but very slightly too, I perceive'—her Ladyship's eyes were glued to her opera-glass—'but her hair is not her own, surely.'

'It is not,' said I, in a low voice; for Ruth was wearing black hair: of course, if she had not been doing so, Cecil must have recognised her immediately; and, even as it was, it struck me as most strange that the eye of love, proverbially so keen, should not have penetrated the disguise which had not baffled even me for long.

'I have seen that girl's face before,' said her Ladyship as she closed her glasses.

'It is not likely,' reasoned I coldly; 'for she has not played in the provinces at all. She came out in town for the first time.'

'I never forget a face,' mused her Ladyship; 'and I have certainly seen hers; but where or when it was, I cannot call to mind.'

I trembled; for if Lady Repton, who had only seen Ruth on one occasion—and that when she was carried out half-dead in Cecil's arms from the sand-pit at Gatcombe—began to have a glimmering recollection of her, would not the truth dawn, sooner or later, upon Cecil himself? Fortunately, however, he never levelled glass at her; and apparently satisfied with the general success of the play, paid no particular attention to the heroine after her first appearance. This indifference, and his position at the back of the box, might even, I began to flatter myself, cause him in his turn to remain unrecognised, because unseen by Ruth. If she had caught sight of him already, at least, she must have been gifted with great self-control, for her whole intelligence had been apparently absorbed in her part, which, indeed, she played to perfection. The piece, in short, was an unequivocal success; and at its close, after the actors had been summoned before the curtain, there arose from all sides that cry of 'Author! Author!' which makes young ears to tingle and the young heart to beat, as much, perhaps, as any sound from

human lips. It was of Nelly that I was thinking then, and of dear Aunt Ben, as, with eyes dew-bright with pleasure, they congratulated me, from their loving hearts, rather than of Cecil or of Ruth; and when, in obedience to this reiterated call, they made way for me to come to the front of the box, in order that I might make my bow, I was unaware that my cousin followed me, doubtless the better to observe the triumph of his friend. He did not see, nor did I see—though Nelly did—a white hand move the drop-scene aside, and a white face gaze out upon us from the stage, with all the pride and triumph faded out of it, and a wild and puzzled look in their place.

It was a moment in my life which, though I can never forget it, I have never been able to recall, as regards those details which generally imprint themselves on the memory so vividly on supreme occasions: I saw a sea of upturned curious faces; I heard a tumult of applause voices, mixed with the clapping of hands; I felt that Aunt Ben was patting me on the back; I knew that Nelly was standing behind me somewhere, with the happy tears in her bright eyes; but I was aware of all these things only in a confused and dream-like fashion; and when a hand was placed on my shoulder, and my cousin's voice said: 'You are wanted, Fred., behind the scenes,' it was like waking from a dream.

A servant in scarlet (for the Corinthum affected splendour in its liveries, though its stage 'properties' enjoyed a well-earned reputation for economy and second-handedness) was standing at the door of the box.

'Miss Brabant wishes to see you for a moment, sir.'

'Ah, that's the worst of it!' groaned Aunt Ben: she seemed to imagine that a dramatic triumph must always needs be purchased by a sacrifice of morality.

'Let Cecil go with him, and see that he is a good boy!' cried Lady Repton, laughing.—'Go, Cecil, go!'

I cannot guess (or, at least, I could not at that time) what it was that made my cousin so obedient to Lady Repton; but as he had come to the theatre at her command, so now he at once arose at her suggestion, and moved towards the door.

'But he has not been asked,' urged Nelly hastily, the first to recognise, that if this matter was carried out, the next moment would bring Ruth and Cecil face to face.

'Yes, yes; it was only my little joke,' pleaded Aunt Ben earnestly; 'of course there can be no harm in Fred's going alone.'

'If you love your friend, Mr Cecil, and have any regard for his good principles, you'll go with him now,' said Lady Repton gravely, though in fits of laughter behind her fan.

'I will certainly go with him,' said Cecil resolutely. He had no longer the appreciation of humour that had once distinguished him, but took everything that was said to him *au pied de lettre*.

'Very good,' said I, not a little displeased with his pertinacity, and irritated by my aunt's folly. 'Since he is so determined to make a fool of himself and me,' thought I, 'let him take the consequences.' So we both followed the man in scarlet.

On the other side of the stage-door, I met Mr Magnus the manager; he held out both his 'helping hands' to welcome me.

'This is a proud moment for you, Mr Wray,' said he. 'I congratulate you heartily. I trust my company has fulfilled your expectations, and rendered your play to your satisfaction.'

'They have quite fulfilled my expectations,' said I dryly, for they had not been very high; 'but Miss Brabant has surpassed them.'

'Ah, yes, she was glorious! I have just been telling her so. You will find her in the green-room.'

She was not there, however, but in her own dressing-closet. Making a sign to Cecil that he should remain behind a little, I knocked at the door, and Ruth opened it with her own hands; she had not changed her stage-attire, and looked very pale, and less like herself than ever.

'You brought your cousin with you to-night,' she began excitedly; 'I wish to—'

'Hush!' said I; 'he is here. He has not recognised you yet. He wishes to be introduced to Miss Brabant.'

'Let it be done,' said she, with a curious sort of defiance in her tone, which I was at a loss to understand; though it was natural enough that she should feel aggrieved with him—that her self-love should be wounded.

She stepped out at once, like a beautiful prince in a fairy tale, and stood with her plumed hat in her hand, while I beckoned to Cecil to come forward.

'This is Miss Brabant,' said I, 'the lady to whose talents I am indebted for the success of my little play.'

He bowed politely, and murmured a few words of commonplace compliment. Cecil had given evidence, in the old days at Gatcombe, of his capacity for acting, but if he was acting now, he would have been a greater than Kean or Kemble. It was perfectly certain that he did not recognise his old love. Wounded to the quick by this, as she well might be, Ruth yet retained her self-possession.

'Have you never seen me before—upon the boards?' asked she, in her stage-voice, and drooping her eyelids after the stage-siren fashion.

'Never,' said he, 'I am ashamed to say, before to-night. But I have long wished to have the honour of being introduced to a lady of whom I have heard my cousin here speak with such admiration and regard.'

He spoke rapidly, and with an indifferent air—under the circumstances, indeed, almost a rude one—like a man who, paying a compliment at the expense of truth, does not even take the trouble to secure *vraisemblance*.

'But you have not seen Miss Brabant at all,' returned she archly, and with a glance of piqued embarrassment at her male costume; 'you have only seen the Foot-page. Now, if you will accompany your cousin to-morrow to Laburnum Villa—for I hope to get him there, to make a few verbal alterations in my part—I shall then have great pleasure in receiving you in my own proper character. I lunch at two—will that hour suit your convenience?'

'I am quite at my Cousin Fred's disposal,' observed Cecil coldly.

'And he is bound to be at mine,' interposed Miss Brabant hastily, just as I was about to frame an excuse; 'so that point is settled.—I will not detain you now any longer,' continued she, addressing

myself, 'because I know what troops of friends are always waiting to congratulate a successful author: I shall see you both to-morrow.'

As she shook Cecil by the hand, she again repeated her invitation. 'You will not fail me, I trust, even if your cousin does?'

'I will come most certainly,' said he; and this time I thought there was really something like warmth in his tone, though it might have been only decision. Was it possible that Ruth was about to attain the unparalleled triumph of winning my cousin's heart twice over—once as the simple village maid, and again as the accomplished actress? I felt well nigh certain, from her behaviour, that that at least was the task which she had set herself to do, and also that she was confident of its accomplishment.

'The Brabant is very beautiful, Cecil,' said I, as we retraced our steps through the labyrinth of narrow ways that led from that Rosamond's Bower of hers into the house. 'Don't you think so?'

'I daresay many persons would,' said he, carelessly; 'but, to my mind, she is only passably good-looking.'

I felt morally certain that this reply was a hypocritical one—for, indeed, it could not have been natural in any man's mouth—and was more convinced than ever that her beauty had made a strong impression on him.

THE KEMBLE.

IN TWO PARTS.—PART II.—JOHN PHILIP.

JOHN PHILIP KEMBLE was born at Prescott, in Lancashire, on the 1st of February 1757, in a farmhouse, according to Mr Fitzgerald; but this statement is contradicted by a gentleman, who, in a letter to the *Times*, says the house in which the tragedian was born stands in a main street of the small town. It seems unlikely that the Kembles, then travelling with a company of strolling players, should have lodged anywhere but in the town. We do not find any mention of the boy's having displayed special talent as a child, in which respect, as in every other, his gifted sister went ahead of him, for she was an 'Infant Phenomenon' when little more than a baby. But the decent respectable stroller, Roger Kemble, whose weakness for ancestry had its commendable side, could not afford to dispense with the aid of his children, even when they were as little as they were numerous, and at intervals, during the gallant struggle he and his good wife maintained, the children were temporarily borrowed from school to tread the boards of the 'circuit.' Roger Kemble prized education for his children. We have seen how Sarah was sent to respectable day-schools, no doubt of the Protestant persuasion, for, according to a strange arrangement, prevalent until lately, the children of mixed marriages were brought up, the girls in the mother's faith, the boys in the father's—and Mrs Kemble was a Protestant. John Philip was a Catholic, like his father, and began life with an imaginary vocation for the priesthood. At ten years old, he was sent to Sedgeley Park, near Wolverhampton; and four years later, he went to Douai, to begin his regular divinity course at the English College, there being no place in England where a priest could make his studies. He had played a few times, as a child, in some of the wonderful

jumbles which formed the entertainments offered by the strolling company—such dignified characters as 'James, Duke of York (afterwards king of England),' and no doubt had thus early imbibed his stately notions and solemn style. The performance of *Charles I.* by the full strength of the company must have been a tremendous exploit, with 'singing between the acts by Mrs Fowler and Miss Kemble.'

John Philip Kemble remained nearly six years at Douai, by which time he was satisfied he had no vocation for the priesthood. He was a diligent student, and all his life retained some of the learning he had acquired there. The celebrated Dr Milner, who was one of his fellow-students, told how much Kemble's power of declamation was admired, and his prodigious memory. Once he generously took on himself an 'imposition' of two books of Homer that were to be learned by heart by the whole class, and amazed the master by repeating fifteen hundred lines. When Kemble had to deliver an oration at one of the public exhibitions of the college, all the professors and scholars poured in. 'Was it some secret turning to the stage,' asks Mr Fitzgerald, 'that caused him to abandon the proposed sacred calling? Considering what his genius proved to be, this was no doubt the case, though his taste was not of the overpowering, irresistible sort which drove Garrick into the profession. It was more likely a repugnance to the state of life appointed for him; but his acting always was marked by a semi-ecclesiastical flavour, a measured deliberation, which came of his old Douai training.'

John Philip was not kindly received on his return to England, and his early experiences of life were undeniably hard. He landed at Bristol, at Christmas-tide, in 1775, and went to Brecknock, where he found the strolling company. His father refused to receive him, and the *corps* made up a small subscription for him, to which the irate Roger was with difficulty induced to add a guinea. He then set off to join Crump and Chamberlain's company at Wolverhampton, but his services were declined, and he tramped on to Liverpool in search of his sister, Mrs Siddons; but she had gone to London, for her first appearance at Drury Lane. After a while, Crump and Chamberlain—who seem to have been the Richardsons of their day, and were respectively nicknamed, as a testimony to the rudeness of the one (Crump), and the roguery of the other (Chamberlain), 'Fox and Bruin'—accepted him, and he made his appearance first as Theodosius, in which he was not successful, and secondly as Bajazet. Mr Fitzgerald gives an amusing account, which is not unpathetic, of these small beginnings.

'There was,' he says, 'a sort of "handy" fellow, named Jones, who enjoyed Garrick's patronage, took leading characters on the circuit, and was popular. Kemble, feeling his way, and ready to use every aid to help himself on, would put in the bills that he would play the particular part "after the manner of Mr Jones!"' His general relations with his managers soon became intolerable, and he was said to have abandoned the *corps*, leaving some doggerel chalked up on the door of the barn which served for theatre:

I fly, to shun impending ruin,

And leave the Fox to fight with Bruin.

He had no means, and the stroller's son no doubt suffered all the traditional privation of the craft,

and had to serve a sore apprenticeship to poverty and humiliation. Lewis the actor relates how, when on a starring tour among the little country theatres, he was greatly struck by a young man who was acting Lovewell in the *Clandestine Marriage* in a very ridiculous dress, but which his correct playing made the spectator forget. He found that this was a Mr John Kemble.

It was in 1778 that Kemble's prospects began to brighten, and there can be little doubt that the rude discipline of the past benefited him in all the future. Like his sister, he was cold, and confident in himself, and had a natural solemnity of manner and taste, which inevitably must have made him the founder, not the follower of a school. His opportunity had not yet come, but it was coming. In October 1778, we find him playing Macbeth at Wakefield, after having played Captain Plume. His grave collected style was attracting attention, and his decorous manner and superior education made friends for him. At Hull, he had a benefit, and contributed a drama of his own on the subject of Belisarius. At York, he played Orestes, Ranger, and Edward the Black Prince; and there he gave the first striking example of the personal dignity and self-respect which distinguished the Kembles, and largely contributed to raise their profession from the degradation which had hitherto characterised it. A woman, who occupied, with some militia officers, the stage-box in the very small theatre, openly and loudly proclaimed her dislike of Mr Kemble's style, and greeted the best scenes of the play with screams of laughter. At last Kemble stopped abruptly, and when the house called on him to go on, he replied that he would do so when the 'lady' had finished her conversation, 'which the tragedy was only interrupting.' This skilful hit produced an effect, and the lady was hissed out of the theatre. The next day, he resolutely declined to make any apology to the militia officers, who presented themselves as this woman's friends. At the theatre that night, the officers saluted him with a loud call for an apology. The rest of the audience took his side, and encouraged him with shouts of 'No apology.' He commenced to explain how he had been treated, when the officers bade him hold his tongue, 'stop his impudence,' and ask pardon without further parley. With a natural and lofty scorn, which he later introduced into Coriolanus, he exclaimed: 'Ask pardon?—never!' and walked off the stage.

He worked very hard, not so hard as his sister did, but not far from it; and his playing was not more conspicuous than his good breeding and cultivation. He soon became known as a man of reading and education. There are few sentimental, and no romantic episodes to be found in Kemble's career. He resembled his sister in steady, matter-of-fact respectability, against which even his habit, later acquired, of drinking largely, never seriously militated. He was devoted to Mrs Inchbald, a woman whose character justified his devotion, as it explained her husband's passionate attachment. When Mr Inchbald died suddenly, all their common acquaintances believed Kemble would make her an offer. But he did not: he wrote a Latin inscription for Mr Inchbald's tomb, addressed a blank-verse ode to his memory, played for the widow's benefit, and remained until her death her fast and faithful friend. By July 1781, he had made his way to Edinburgh, where he

played Puff. His diligence and steadiness were bearing fruit: he was beginning to be heard of as a safe, sound, effective actor; and Mr Daly, the manager of the Theatre Royal, Dublin, engaged him for the season at the 'star' salary of five pounds a week. 'He must,' says Mr Fitzgerald, 'have hailed this translation with delight. The Dublin audiences were critical but enthusiastic, and if they approved heartily, that passport was sure to throw wide open the doors of the London houses.'

The turn of his luck had come, but the tide of it rose with only moderate force. His acting was much admired in Dublin, but Daly put him on in injudicious parts. He was almost as ill-treated in this respect as his famous sister, of whom Garrick and others were obstinately bent on making a comedian. Fortunately, a popular Castle equerry, one Captain Jephson, brought out a play called the *Count of Narbonne*, which made a great success, and advanced Kemble immensely in public favour. He had considerable social success too, and though convivial enough, was always dignified and composed. In the cast of Captain Jephson's play, there appears the insignificant name of Miss Francis, which its unfortunate owner was to change for that of Mrs Jordan. Miss Younge and Kemble divided the triumph of the season, then played at Cork and Limerick, and returned to Dublin with all the advantage derived from Mrs Siddons' extraordinary contemporaneous success in London.

When Kemble made his first appearance in London, excellent comedians abounded; but Henderson was the only tragic actor of any pretension left. His career, too, was shortly to close; so that the new actor, like his sister, had every advantage of opportunity. On the 30th September 1783, a few days after his brother Stephen had appeared at Covent Garden, John Philip first trod the boards of Drury Lane as Hamlet. From the beginning to the end, he was perfectly successful. His singularly handsome figure and grace, his elegant dress, his extraordinary likeness to his sister, reaching even to the voice, and his perfect self-possession and deliberation, struck every critic. Though his first appearance was not an extraordinary and tumultuous success like his sister's, like Garrick's, like Kean's, it is interesting to read the account of it, remembering the great career which lay in the future beyond it:

'His reading of the part was different from Garrick's or any other player's. He threw a softness and tenderness over the character. His performance was evidently the result of careful and intellectual study of the play—there was the most judicious elocution, and a new emphasis. The same imperfection that had imperilled the success of his sister on her first appearance was noticed in his voice, but this was imputed to his being accustomed to the smaller Dublin house. Still, in its softer inflection, it shewed uncommon feeling. John Taylor was struck with the laboriously critical tone of the character, but owned he never saw such an improvement as study and repetition brought to the representation—an improvement owing in no slight degree to the laborious exercise of having written out the part no less than forty times.'

The brother and sister appeared together for the first time in the *Gamester*; but Kemble did not make much of Beverley. Then came the triumph

of a royal command, and they played in *King John* splendidly. Court favour, then only bestowed on real merit, and unattainable by low burlesque actors and idiotic comic singers, meant much in those days, and was lavishly bestowed upon the Kembles to the last. From that moment, Mrs Siddons reigned supreme as an interpreter of Shakspeare, and her brother advanced on his slow and steady course, making every step sure. His *Othello*, to which Mrs Siddons played Desdemona with exquisite grace and softness, was an advance towards those grand and majestic interpretations for which he was later to be famous. He played *Othello* in the dress of an English general officer. Soon his magnificent performance of *Macbeth*, for his own benefit, supported by his sister, was to throw all his former feats into the shade. Beside this masterpiece, *Othello* was a failure. For the first time in his career, John Philip Kemble was greeted with tumultuous and unbounded applause. On this success ensued two monotonous years, full of triumph to the sister, and of hard work and study to the brother, who was cautiously and patiently trying experiments in great parts. To this period belongs the story of his marriage, which surprised every one, and certainly was inconsistent with his cautious, calculating, and self-seeking character. The lady was the widow of Brereton, a handsome man, and an indifferent actor, who died in a lunatic asylum in 1787. She was pretty, interesting, but not clever, and quite penniless. He signified his intentions to her in a royal manner, informing her that she should shortly hear some very good news. Her mother, interpreting the oracular utterance to indicate a proposal of marriage, bade her acquiesce, which she did. She made him a very good wife, and was apparently a very happy woman. Charles Kemble married the pretty Miss De Camp, a French dancer.

The story of Kemble's management of Drury Lane, under the chief proprietorship of Sheridan, is the story of every one who had any transactions with that brilliant scoundrel—fascination, speculation, delusion, and loss. Kemble succeeded King in the management, and began with a good company, and a fair opening for himself to the playing of important parts, in consequence of the retirement of one or two actors. He now played *Romeo*, *Sciolto*, *Zanga*, and several leading characters in comedy, in which, taking the average of the various criticisms, he does not appear to have thoroughly succeeded. A splendid revival of *Macbeth*, and that of *Coriolanus*, the leading character of which became identified with Kemble himself, whose physical and mental qualities suited it to perfection, were the leading features of his first season of management. Mrs Siddons made a great success as *Volumnia*; and the result of the two great undertakings satisfactorily proved Kemble's fitness for his post. At the end of that first year, Mrs Siddons, tired out by Sheridan's intolerable conduct—she was the only person whom he did not cheat courteously; to her he was rude—retired from the theatre. Sheridan boasted that they were so strong in comedy that they could do without her; there is no doubt public taste did turn towards comedy just then for a while; but the next season he made prodigious efforts, happily successful, to induce her to return. This season was made remarkable by the revival of *Henry V.* and the *Tempest*, and by Kemble's ridiculous

performance of *Don Juan*, the most ill-judged attempt he ever made. In this year too, 1791, Old Drury, having been formally condemned by the architects, was levelled to the ground; and the new theatre, which was to be the scene of such strange events, and to meet with such *opportune* destruction, was commenced. Mr Fitzgerald describes the demise of the old house as the herald of the death-hour of a good school of acting, which was to disappear with the destruction of the walls within which an audience could see and hear. 'With this old and classical structure,' he says, 'passed away a host of reverent associations. There Johnson, and Reynolds, and Goldsmith had sat and criticised; there Garrick, a young man about town, had gone on as harlequin; there Woffington had captivated all by her Sir Harry; there, in the front row of the pit near the "spikes," had Churchill sat and taken notes for his *Rosciad*; there the greatest school of English actors had been formed, traditions of which, even at "third" hand, now make the excellence of any acting that is at all respectable.'

The relations between Sheridan and Kemble were very peculiar and embarrassing. Sheridan never dreamed of keeping his word if it suited his temporary convenience to violate it, and thus it became a sheer impossibility for Kemble to carry out the plans he arranged, and he found himself constantly involved in quarrels and disputes, highly derogatory to his superabundant personal dignity and high sense of honour. Sheridan's keen humour was constantly tickled by the majestic, somewhat buckram solemnity of the tragedian, who never unbent, but whose temper was not sullen, and gave way before the blandishments of Brinsley. Kemble had the profoundest admiration for his clever friend. He knew nothing of politics, and scarcely ever looked into a newspaper, but any allusion to Sheridan was certain to make him break out in raptures over his hero. At the same time, the sense of the treatment he met with from the god of his idolatry threw him into an amusing conflict. 'I know him thoroughly,' he would say angrily, 'all his amusing tricks and artifices;' and then he would threaten to join a political society, 'The Friends of the People,' and go there to expose him. The new theatre—which differed from the old in all points material for keeping up the drama as an art, and guarding it from the mere upholstery and spectacle of these degenerate days—was inaugurated by the performance of *Macbeth*. Even Mrs Siddons was excited on the occasion, on which her powers were subjected to totally new conditions, and the reign of 'sensation' may be said to have commenced. 'I am told,' she writes to Lady Harcourt, apropos of the preparations, 'that the banquet is a *thing to go and see of itself*.' Before this day, such a sentiment had never been heard, and Mr Fitzgerald says, 'this short and enthusiastic note positively contains an epitome of the decay of the stage.' On this occasion, John Philip Kemble introduced his brother Charles to the audience. He was an interesting young actor, destined to achieve reputation in certain parts, but had no greatness about him. Kemble then introduced the dreary pieces which we know generally, and inaccurately, as the *German Drama*, and which had a success which we, to whom their dull horrors and sickly sentimentality are altogether repulsive, find it difficult to understand. After a brief

retirement, in disgust, Kemble again undertook the management, in 1800—1801, and his own and his sister's troubles with Sheridan recommenced at once, to be terminated only by their final retirement in 1802, when Sheridan was so foolish as to make no exertion to satisfy their just demands. Charles and Stephen remained, but they were only ordinary stock actors. From that time a steady decay settled upon the theatre, which must have led to universal confusion and the ruin of all concerned. 'Nothing,' says Mr Fitzgerald, 'short of a grand conflagration could bring matters to a simple issue.'

Mr Harris of Covent Garden was the exact opposite of Sheridan, punctual in his payments, and honourable in his dealing. Through his old friend, Mrs Inchbald, and aided by Mr Heathcote, who lent him a large sum of money, Kemble negotiated with Mr Harris the purchase of a sixth share in the great 'house,' where he became stage-manager, deriving an income from Covent Garden of two thousand five hundred pounds a year, and mustering a strong party of Kembles under his direction. Then he went abroad, and was 'overwhelmed with distinction' by the English in Paris, the great Talma doing the honours of the beautiful city to the 'Le Kain of England,' but not admiring him too cordially. In 1802, old Roger Kemble died, and in John Philip's letter to his brother on the occasion there is heartfelt grief and pathos, and no touch of the pedantry which generally disfigured his style, and contrasted unfavourably with his sister's vigorous and unaffected prose.

On his return to Covent Garden, Kemble, or 'Black Jack,' as they called him, was found to have greatly developed his 'gift' of drinking, and it is a fact that this, his only moral defect, helped to soften much of the prejudice caused by his austere manners. In 1803, he made his appearance in Hamlet; and three days later, his sister played Isabella, just as they had done at Drury Lane. This season was marked by the absurd and contemptible episode of the 'Young Roscius,' a discreditable folly not matched in the history of the stage. The Kembles could well afford to smile at it, and wait until it had passed by; but it is even now provoking to stage historians to have to record that an enthusiasm exceeding what was excited by Garrick or Siddons was caused by Master Betty, a boy of thirteen, and that his twenty-eight nights' playing brought Sheridan nearly twenty thousand pound receipts.

On the 8th September 1808, the season commenced with *Macbeth*, and on the 20th, the great theatre was burned to ashes. The loss of property was immense, twenty lives were sacrificed, and the insurances were for only fifty thousand pounds. The actresses' jewels, the performers' valuable wardrobes, Handel's organ, the wines of the Beefsteak Club, opera scores of Handel, Arne, and others, original manuscripts of plays, made the loss most disastrous. For Kemble it was a terrible blow. He had to begin the world after thirty years' hard work. But the deserving actor found true friends. The Duke of Northumberland offered him a loan of ten thousand pounds on his simple bond; and a few weeks later, when the first stone of the new theatre was laid, cancelled the bond, and made him a present of the whole sum. In less than eight months, the new building, destined also to be destroyed by fire half a century later, was completed, and while it was being built, Drury

Lane was burned down; a disastrous finale which very conveniently concluded Sheridan's financial connection with the theatre, and is associated with one of his most famous *impromptus faits à loisir*.

The story of the O. P. Riots, which ensued on the opening of the new theatre, is too well known to need repetition. The only person not involved in the disgrace of these proceedings was Kemble. In 1812, Mrs Siddons retired. Her brother led her off the scene of her splendid triumphs, and then withdrew from the stage for a while. He had many warnings that his own time of supremacy was to be short. He was a sufferer from severe gout, and a rival was uprising. Edmund Kean had made his appearance, and the town, familiar with Kemble's cultivated elocution for thirty years, was carried away by the young actor's novelty, force, and fire. There was danger from another quarter. Young was attracting notice; and when he played Cassius to Kemble's Brutus, there were those who said he was the better actor of the two. That such things should be, were stabs for the decaying great player. The prosperity of the theatre began to decline; and at length Kemble, though he might have counted on making a good income for some five years longer, decided that he would not linger, as his sister had done. 'Twere well that 'twere done quickly.' In 1817, he took leave of his Scotch friends, giving a round of farewell performances in Edinburgh. He played Coriolanus splendidly, but appropriately selected *Macbeth* for his final performance. The scene has been finely described by Sir Walter Scott. The 23d June 1817 was fixed for his last appearance on the stage of his own theatre. He had given a long and grand series of farewell performances, and took his leave in his fine character of Coriolanus.

For six years, he and his wife lived abroad, very happy, and universally respected. On the 20th February 1823, he died, quite unexpectedly, and deeply regretted. His wife survived him for twenty-two years. He was a great actor, and an eminently respectable man. It would be well for the stage and the public if, in both respects, there were more adherence to the tradition of John Philip Kemble.

A DEAD JEST.

Among my books I found to-day
A paper which, I don't know how,
Had years before been put away,
And left forgotten there till now.
I took it up to read. Ah me!
After the first few words or so,
My eyes were grown too dim to see.
It was a jest of long ago.
No deepest grief it woke again;
It brought no sharp especial sting;
Only the general mystic pain
That distant memories always bring.
So altered seem the days of yore,
So near akin are smiles and tears,
That few sad things can move us more
Than those dead jests of bygone years.

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